



presented to



by





In the
Presence
of God

Devotions for the Newly Married

Otto W. Toelke



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FOREWORD

The story is told of a young lady who was terribly nervous about her upcoming wedding. She asked her mother for advice, especially for the actual wedding day.

“When you walk down that aisle,” the mother said, “I want you to think only of three things. First, I want you to think of the word *aisle* and of the many times you walked down the aisle on Sunday morning, excited to hear the Word of God.

“Second, I want you to think of the word *altar* and how it represents the presence of God in the church. Just remember, Jesus is there at your wedding and also goes with you in your marriage.

“Third, I want you to look at the man you’re about to marry and think only of *him*. Think how wonderful your life together will be!”

The young lady religiously followed her mother's instructions. On her wedding day, all the way down the aisle, people could hear her saying to herself, "aisle ... altar ... him."

There were many smiles on the faces of the wedding guests as she repeated over and over, "aisle ... altar ... him."

Although the young lady was more than likely not thinking she could alter her husband, many brides and grooms believe they can change their spouses once they're married. We cannot bring about any real change in another person because change comes in only one way—through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

There are two purposes for coming into God's presence through these devotions: 1) to recall the promises you made on your wedding day, and 2) to grow in your love for God and for each other as the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God.

If we're honest, most of us were probably too nervous on our wedding day to hear or remember the vows we spoke or the promises we made. Many of us were as nervous as the young woman in the illustration. Some of us may



PREFACE

This little volume requires some explanation. While we like to think that it can be profitably read by all, it has as its special target the married couple. The devotions are based on phrases taken from the marriage ceremony. If the devotions are put to use in the early stages of a marriage, then the words of the ceremony are more likely to be remembered and to strike a responsive cord.

These devotions are intended to get husband and wife started in the practice of family devotions. There is an old German maxim which, loosely translated, says, "A good beginning is half the victory." If the couple begin their marriage by regularly and freely speaking to each other about the things of God and of the spirit, this is, indeed, good and augurs well for the future of the marriage.

If acknowledgments for motivation to write these devotions were to be recorded, I would have to place at the top of the list the hundreds of young couples I was privileged to serve as a

marital counselor during my years in the parish ministry.

I send forth this little volume with an honest and deep sense of its many shortcomings but with the sincere prayer that it will help bring to some the blessing that the bride and groom at the wedding of Cana enjoyed more than 1,900 years ago. Christ was a guest in their home from its very beginning.

Otto W. Toelke



In the Presence of God

THE MAGIC OF MARRIAGE

The beautiful and impressive words of the marriage ceremony, “We are assembled here in the presence of God and these witnesses to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony ...” still ring in your ears. It has been only a short time since the pastor announced to God and the world that from this day forward you will live as one person. You will not only share with each other, but you will give to each other all that it is possible for you to give of love, of spirit, and of understanding.

It was a beautiful ceremony. It was almost like magic. You entered the church unmarried, and then, within a matter of minutes, everything in your lives suddenly changed. Before there were two hearts, two minds, two spirits. Then, suddenly, as you left the church, it was—and this is not as unreal as it may sound—one heart, one mind, and one spirit. Never, as long as either

shall live, can your thoughts about the things that really matter in life exclude the welfare of the other.

The union of husband and wife is close and intimate. Indeed, it is one of the strongest of human bonds. It was designed by the heavenly Architect. You entered this union, as the ceremony says, “in the presence of God.” You need never be frightened and the union will never be threatened or broken as long as you remain in the presence of God.

Our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself into death for our sins and rose again victoriously from that death, has given us the blessed assurance that His presence is available to us at all times. In His holy Word He tells us, “And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

If the presence of God is lost, it is not because He withdraws from us, but because we, by our sins, withdraw from Him. Your marriage was sealed in the presence of God. He wanted it that way. You wanted it that way. Resolve in these first days of your marriage that, with His help, you will do everything to keep it in the presence of God.



Instituted by God

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Have you ever tried to explain the origin of marriage apart from God? It is difficult to do. Anthropologists and sociologists, studying the origin and development of human beings and society, glibly write that the male and the female were driven together by sheer biological impulse or necessity, or by the herding instinct; that there were certain animal passions or drives in both male and female, and seeing themselves as physically complementing each other, they were naturally drawn together.

One man of God made the statement that when we attempt to explain the origin of marriage in this particular way, we soon find ourselves using the language of the barnyard. Such an explanation, the one apart from God, tends to degrade humanity and marriage.

Is it not much more credible and beautiful

to take the Holy Record as we find it in the very first book of the Bible (Genesis 2:18, 21–24): “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ ... So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman” for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

This simple but mysterious, this beautiful and profound record of the origin of marriage is the one Christians accept. We not only accept it, but cling to it. First, the Bible record makes us think of ourselves and our spouses as children of God rather than brutes or animals. Second, the Bible record puts into marriage not only the purpose of propagation, but the high and noble purposes of the divine order.

Some may say that they do not leave God out of the picture, but that they cannot believe